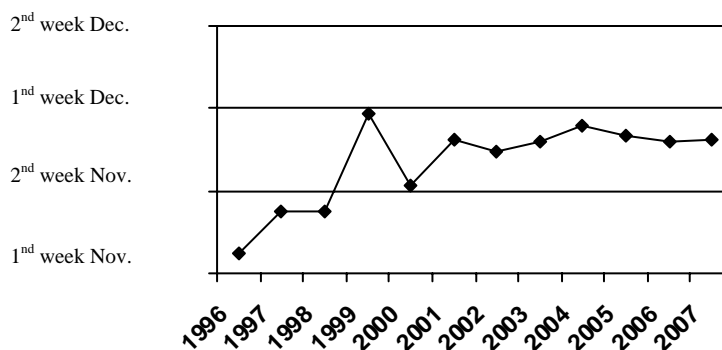


## HUNTERS' VIEWS ABOUT WATERFOWL SEASON DATES

After each of the 1996-2007 seasons, we asked hunters to indicate the week they most preferred to hunt ducks in the county they hunted most. The predominant theme after mild seasons during 1997-1999 was for a later duck season structure. After an early freeze-up in 2000, hunters indicated earlier season preferences. Now the average preferred week to hunt is nearly two weeks later than in 1996.

**Figure 11. Statewide week preferred to hunt ducks, 1996-2007**



Based on hunters' desires for later seasons, Missouri moved the opening date back about week in each zone beginning in 2004. Since then, the duck season has opened on the last Saturday in October in the North Zone, the first Saturday in November in the Middle Zone, and the Friday after Thanksgiving in the South Zone. This season structure provides a potential range of opening dates from October 25 through October 31 in the North Zone and November 1 through November 7 in the Middle Zone. In the South Zone, the Friday after Thanksgiving falls from November 23-29. However, during years when the Friday after Thanksgiving occurs on November 28 or 29, the South Zone must open earlier to provide a 60-day season that closes by the last Sunday in January – the latest date allowed according to the federal framework.

All hunter preferences are legitimate; however, varied attitudes about the “best” season are not necessarily shared by all hunters even in a local area. Species preferences (mallards vs. other dabblers), habitat types (shallow, managed sites vs. reservoirs and rivers), and weather conditions (mild vs. severe) are just some of the factors that contribute to differences in views about preferred season timing. As a result, waterfowl season dates always are points of contention. Maintaining opening dates associated with specific weeks of the month allows the timing of duck season to vary by seven days within a six-year period and accommodates those with earlier or later preferences over this period of time.

Figure 12. North Zone – Week preferred to hunt ducks, 2002-2006 average & 2007.

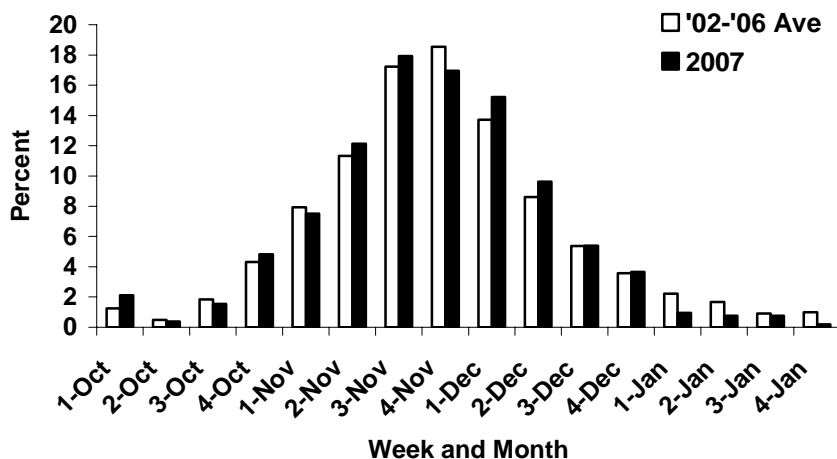


Figure 13. Middle Zone – Week preferred to hunt ducks, 2002-2006 average & 2007.

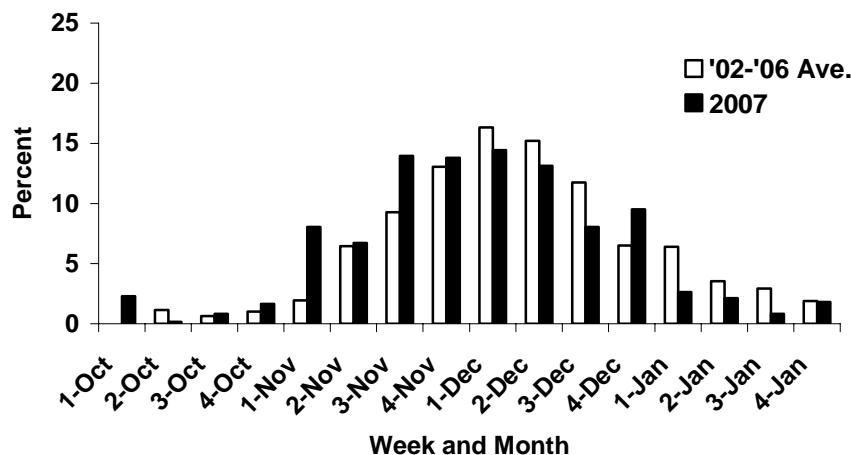
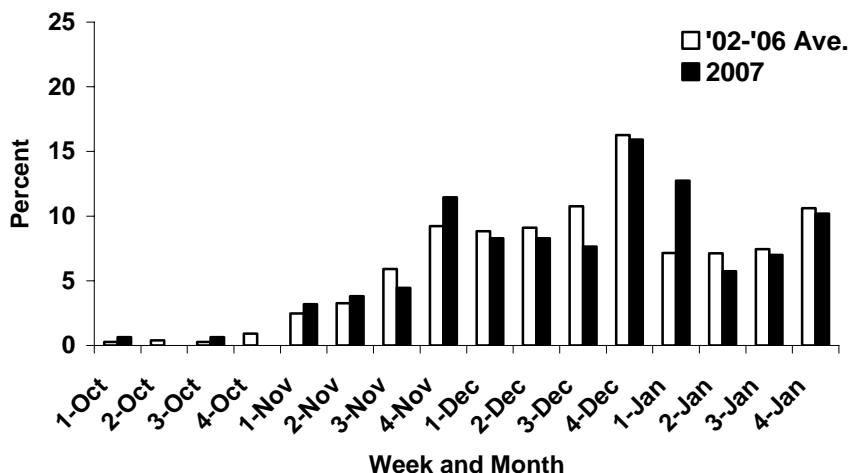


Figure 14. South Zone – Week preferred to hunt ducks, 2002-2006 average & 2007.



After the 2007 season, 55% of North Zone hunters indicated their preferred week to hunt was in November, which was similar to the range over the previous five years (53%-58%), but lower than 2000 (66%). On average, North Zone hunters most preferred to hunt the 4<sup>th</sup> week of December and only 10% indicated that their preferred week to hunt was earlier or later than the dates offered last year. Middle Zone hunters preferred to hunt about a week later and only 12% indicated a season preference earlier or later than what was offered in 2007. South Zone hunters had the most disparate preferences with 23% of them preferring to hunt in November, 40% in December, and 36% in January. Twenty-three percent of duck hunters in the South Zone

indicated their preferred week to hunt was either earlier or later than what was offered during 2008.

With the exception of the South Zone, duck hunters have responded favorably to the changes in season structure first implemented in 2004. Less than 20% of North Zone hunters indicated that they were dissatisfied with season dates in each of the last three years (Figure 15). Hunters in the Middle Zone were also generally satisfied,

with only 21% indicating that they were dissatisfied with the 2007-08 season dates. However, in the South Zone, the proportion of hunters dissatisfied with season dates has nearly doubled with an increase from 17% in 2005 to 32% in 2007. The increase in dissatisfaction among South Zone hunters has coincided with progressively earlier seasons due to the timing of Thanksgiving holiday weekend.

**Figure 15. Satisfaction with season dates, 2005- 2007.**

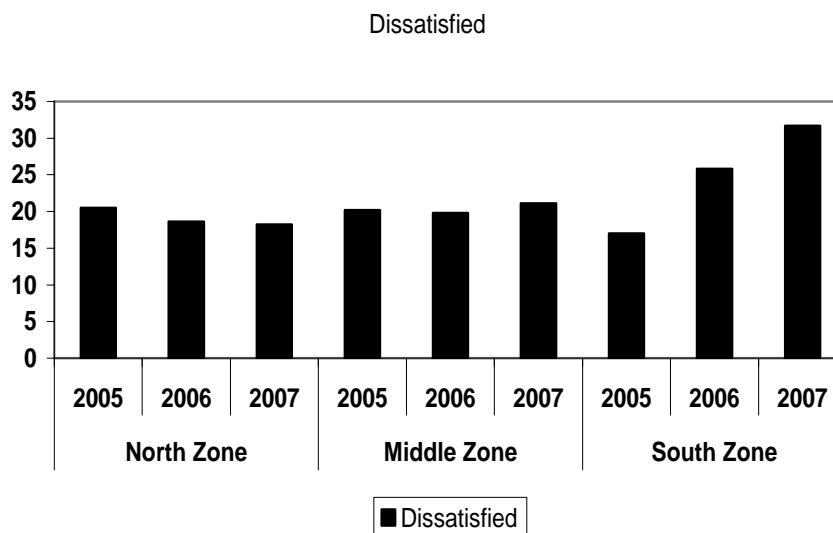
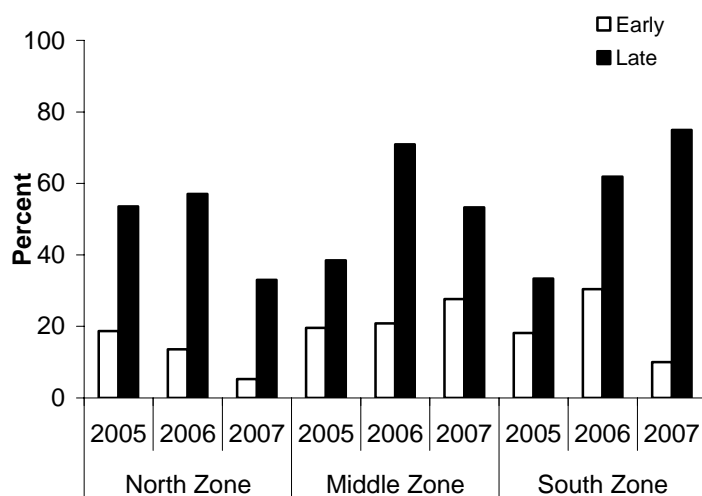


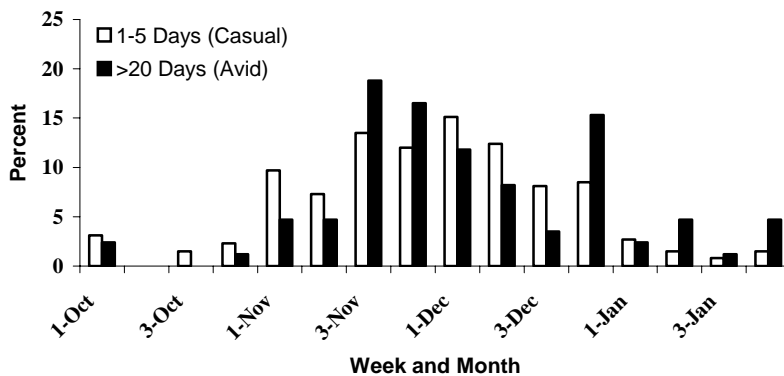
Figure 16 focuses on those hunters that indicated the week they most preferred to hunt was either earlier or later than the dates provided during the previous year's season. Hunters who prefer

**Figure 16. Percent of hunters dissatisfied with season dates by those with early & late season preferences, 2005-2007.**



dates later than the previous year's structure continue to express more dissatisfaction with season dates than hunters who prefer earlier dates. In the South Zone, for example, 75% of the hunters that indicated they preferred to hunt later than offered by the most recent season structure also indicated they were dissatisfied with season dates. On the other hand, only 10% of those preferring earlier seasons were dissatisfied with season dates.

**Figure 17. Week preferred to hunt by avid and casual Middle Zone hunters, 2006.**



### **Avid versus Casual Hunters:**

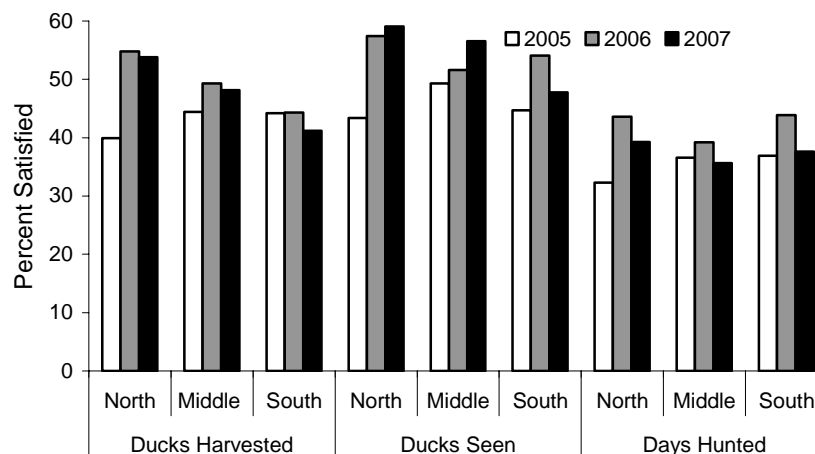
Avid hunters, the 15% who hunt more than 20 days per season, and casual hunters, the 43% who hunt less than 6 days per season, both must be considered when Missouri duck seasons are recommended. Their views, however, about preferred weeks to hunt are somewhat different. For example, in the Middle Zone avid hunters preferred to hunt nearly a week later than

casual hunters (Figure 17). The challenge is to provide seasons that encourage new and potentially future duck hunters while maintaining involvement of more experienced hunters.

### **Measures of Hunter Satisfaction:**

Each year we ask hunters how satisfied they were with the number of ducks they saw and harvested, as well as how satisfied they were with the number of days they hunted (Figure 18). The most substantial increases in satisfaction occurred in the North Zone where the proportion of hunters satisfied with the number of the ducks they harvested increased from 40% in 2005 to 54% in 2007, and the proportion of hunters expressing satisfaction with ducks seen increased from 43% in 2005 to 59% in 2007. Hunters' satisfaction with the number of days they hunt is influenced by many personal and environmental factors other than season length.

**Figure 18. Hunter satisfaction by zone, 2005, 2006, and 2007.**



On-going monitoring of hunter satisfaction suggests that hunter expectations are high. To illustrate, in 2006 and 2007, years with record harvests and 60-day seasons, less than 60% of hunters indicated they were satisfied with the number of ducks they harvested or the number of

ducks they observed. In 2005, fewer than 50% expressed satisfaction even though statewide harvest and opportunity remained high.

### Canada Goose Season Considerations:

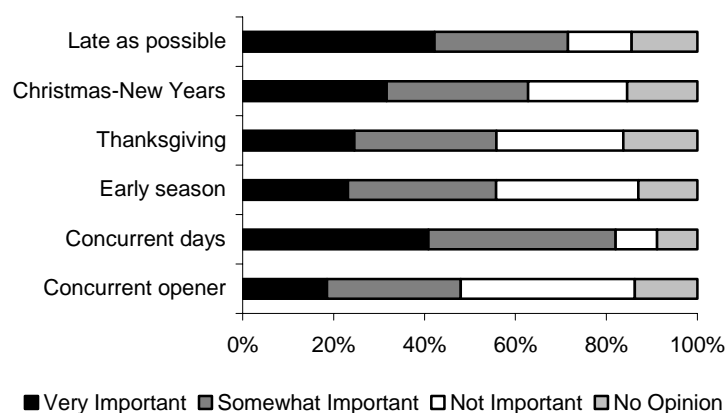
While hunter input plays an important role in determining duck hunting season dates, it plays a lesser role in regards to Canada geese. Population status of giant Canada geese and Eastern Prairie Population (EPP) Canada geese are the primary considerations. Giant Canada numbers are higher and more stable than EPP Canada geese and therefore can sustain greater harvests. Canada goose harvest management in the Mississippi Flyway is designed to maximize harvest opportunity for giant Canada geese without over-harvesting EPP Canada geese and other interior Canada goose populations.

Preferences among Canada goose hunters have changed dramatically since the 1980s. Growing numbers of giant Canada geese, delays in migration of the EPP, and a wider distribution of geese in Missouri have contributed to these changes.

Traditionally, hunters indicated a desire for concurrent duck and goose openers (73% in 1988 and 63% in 1996), but this has become less important

(48% in 2002). In 2002, 82% of goose hunters still favored having at least some concurrent duck and goose days. Goose hunters now desire more late season opportunity (72% indicated it was important to have the goose season open as late as possible); however, 56% of goose hunters also indicated that it was important to have early season opportunity. We consider the timing of Thanksgiving weekend and Christmas/New Year's week and the need to control numbers of giant Canada geese (primarily through early seasons) as additional factors affecting goose season recommendations.

**Figure 19. Goose hunter opinions of when goose seasons should be open.**



### North and Middle Zone Considerations:

North Zone Canada goose hunters are beginning to hone in on the last week of December and the first two weeks of January as their preferred week to hunt Canada geese with 46% indicating their preferred week to hunt was during this period (Figure 20). Middle Zone Canada goose hunters prefer to hunt later with 51% indicating their preferred week to hunt was in January, compared to 34% in December, and 16% in October or November (Figure 21).

### South Zone

#### Considerations:

Delayed migrations and few resident giant Canada geese have traditionally contributed to late season hunting preference among South Zone goose hunters. From 2002-2006, 51% of South Zone goose hunters indicated they most preferred to hunt geese in January (Figure 22). This trend continued in 2007 with 56% of South Zone Goose hunters indicating they preferred to hunt during this period.

Figure 20. North Zone – Week most preferred to hunt Canada geese.

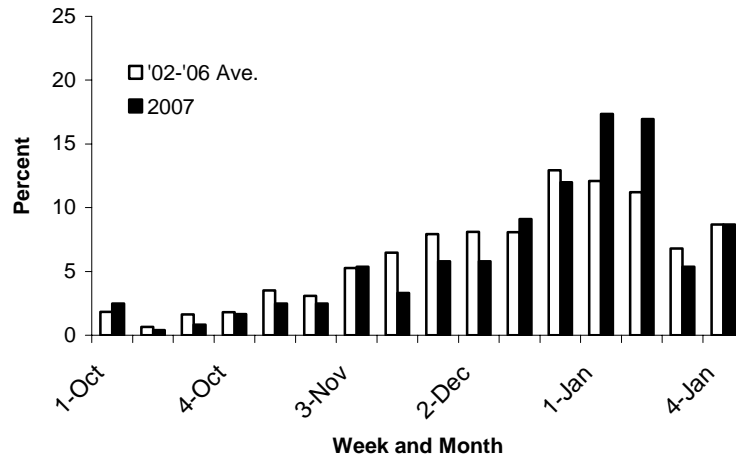


Figure 21. Middle Zone – Week most preferred to hunt Canada geese.

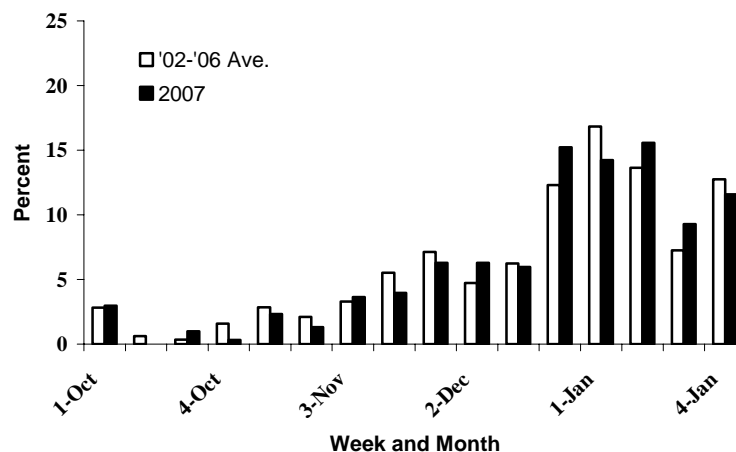
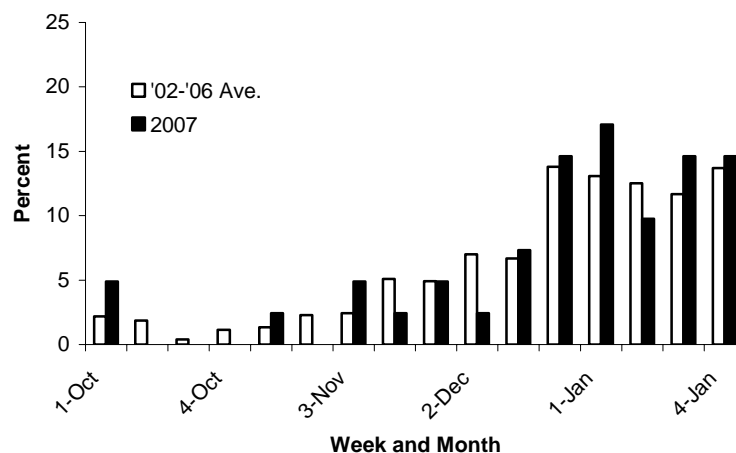


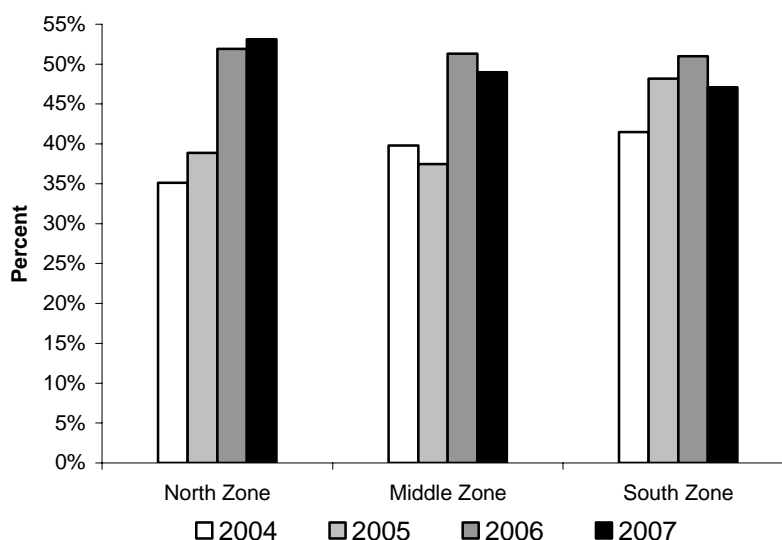
Figure 22. South & Southeast Zone – Week most preferred to hunt Canada geese.



### Goose Hunter Satisfaction:

Goose hunters responded favorably to the changes in Canada goose season structure implemented in 2006. In the North Zone, where hunters experienced bag limit restrictions in 2004, the percent of hunters satisfied with Canada goose season dates climbed from 39% in 2005 to 53% in 2007 (Figure 23). Middle and South Zone goose hunters also responded favorably with nearly 50% of goose hunters now indicating satisfaction with Canada goose season dates.

**Figure 23. Percent of goose hunters satisfied with Canada goose season dates, 2004 – 2007.**



### Morning Drawing Update:

Every Member Draws (EMD) is an incentive-based method of allocating waterfowl hunting opportunity employed at certain high-demand Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) managed waterfowl hunting areas. EMD was piloted in 2004 and 2005 at Eagle Bluffs and Otter Slough Conservation Areas, and was expanded to Grand Pass, Ten Mile Pond, Bob Brown and Columbia Bottom in 2006. Under the traditional, One Member Draws (OMD) system, only one member of each hunting party draws a numbered pill to determine the party's place in line to select a hunting location. Under EMD, each member of the hunting party (maximum party size = 4) draws a numbered pill with the party using the lowest number drawn to determine their place in line. EMD provides an incentive for hunters to hunt in larger parties, because as party size increases, the probability of drawing a more favorable position also increases.

*Future Approach:* Every Member Draws will be continued at the same areas in 2008 as in 2007. Areas with more moderate demand will continue the traditional One Member Draws system. It is neither required nor appropriate that EMD be applied to all MDC managed waterfowl hunting areas. Expansion to low-demand areas likely would not derive a significant level of response in party size and may not be needed where demand is currently satisfied. Drawing systems will be evaluated at three year intervals, or at the time Missouri experiences something other than a 60-day duck season. Decision criteria will include: (1) level of hunting demand, (2) hunter opinion as reflected in periodic hunter attitude surveys, (3) attainment of desired increases in party size and total hunting trips, and (4) consideration to ensure individual hunters and/or groups of hunters do not dominate usage to the disadvantage of others hunters.